

VALUING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

by

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Abstract

Despite a multitude of evidence that suggests formative assessment is valuable to both student and teacher learning, research indicates this practice has not yet become routine in the high school classroom culture. The traditional high school environment of teaching, testing and moving on is not supported by research, and is actually disputed by many (Kohn, 1999; Muncer, 2006).

This report has been motivated by reputable and comprehensive research conducted by Brookhart (2011), Leahy, Shepard and Stiggins (2001, 2002, 2009), and Black and Wiliam (1998, 2011). Undeniably, though, it was the landmark article by Black and Wiliam, *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment* (1998) which identified the correlation between effective formative assessment and student achievement that motivated professional development in formative assessment *for* and *of* learning.

In their research, Black and Wiliam (1998) point to the use of formative assessment in classroom practices as being essential to increasing achievement among students. In addition, formative assessment “. . .within the reach of all teachers, can contribute substantially to raising standards. . .” (p. 146). I was intrigued by the suggestion that all teachers have the ability to use formative assessment, and wanted to know more about how this would look in a secondary classroom, especially high school *English Language Arts*. The aim of this research project, *Valuing Formative Assessment in the High School Classroom*, does not include finding one definitive answer, but to initiate and/or expand the dialogue on formative assessment practices at the High School.

Preface

In pursuing a Masters in Education degree, I have been motivated by personal reflection on my classroom experiences in the public education system in New Brunswick. Other than teaching for a year in a small rural high school in this province, my eighteen years as a high school teacher has been in a larger, urban school. My teaching and learning experiences have given me perspective on the changing landscape of the classroom, including the increasingly diverse needs of the students within its walls. Even though researchers document the benefits to formative assessment in classrooms (Black & William, 1998; Heritage, 2007; Stiggins, 2009), Brookhart (2009) states “...high quality formative assessment is rarely a consistent part of the classroom culture” (p. 1). To me, this makes sense as I have always felt that I knew what my students could do, but wonder if I valued what I knew about student ability when it came time to assign a grade or mark on their report card? Was I making their learning explicit? I did not have the knowledge or the skill to put formative assessment to work for myself or for my students.

This report is comprised of three components. The opening comments maintain a focus on the changes to the high school classroom that I have experienced. In addition to reflecting upon the experiences that have motivated my desire to learn more about my own practices, this section of the report will include both biographical information, as well as anecdotes that initiated my desire to focus attention on formative assessment; particularly in a high school setting. The second component is a review of the literature related to formative assessment that is anchored in reputable and comprehensive research conducted by: Brookhart (2011), Shepard (2000), Stiggins (2009), Davies (2011), Davies

and Herbst (2014), Stiggins and Dufour (2009) and Wiliam and Leahy (2015).

Undeniably, though, it was the landmark article by Black and Wiliam (1998), *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment*, which identified the correlation between effective formative assessment and student achievement that motivated my current research into formative assessment *for* and *of* learning. In their research, Black and Wiliam (1998) point to the use of formative assessment in classroom practices as being essential to increasing achievement among students. In addition, the authors state that formative assessment is “. . .within the reach of all teachers, [and it] can contribute substantially to raising standards. . .” (p. 146).

As I read this precedent setting article, I was intrigued by the suggestion that all teachers have the ability to use formative assessment in their classroom. This was not what I had been experiencing in the high school classroom. For some reason, myself, and many colleagues of mine were not embracing the practice of formative assessment. As Brookhart and Moss (2009) point out “[t]eachers are neither sufficiently familiar with it nor equipped with the knowledge or the skill to put formative assessment to work for themselves or their students” (p.1). In addition, Wiliam and Leahy (2015) state that educators do not need more professional development; instead what they need is support making modest changes to their habitual classroom practices, a process that takes sustained effort and support.

Another challenge in high school is the assigning of grades that reflect and value the practice of observation of and conversation about student learning. As Davies and Herbst (2014) point out the process of determining worth, or value, of all the evidence of a student’s learning is complex, and

[s]imply totaling the scores in our record books means that important evidence may not be considered, and the learning will therefore not be accurately represented...[t]otaling scores from rubrics and averaging them with other kinds of numbers is like adding mangoes, potatoes, apples and trees. It does not make mathematical sense. (p. 65)

Might this be the case for high school teachers, where the demand for assigning numerical grades is also a priority?

The third component is a reflection of my classroom practices, as well as the initial steps that I have taken to value formative assessment in student grades. With this in mind, the aim in my research project is not to find one definitive answer, but to initiate and/or expand dialogue on formative assessment practices in a high school environment.

Acknowledgements

To every student who shared their struggles, fears, and frustrations with me as they ventured through high school, thank you for giving me the privilege of being part of your journey. You have propelled my desire to value all your learning; not simply the test scores.

To my graduate supervisor, Dr. Sherry Rose, thank you for encouraging me to engage in critical thinking by seeking answers to questions that I never even knew existed. The energy and enthusiasm you exude with assessment and evaluation discussions has greatly impacted my own teaching practices.

To my esteemed colleagues, thank you for trusting me with your reflections and anecdotes, and for encouraging professional dialogue that fosters student, and teacher, learning.

To my family: my world! My son Brandon, who has taught me more about having faith in myself than any textbook ever could. You have been at my side for every step of this journey; from Undergraduate to Graduate, and I would not want it any other way. Thank you to Dwight, whose encouragement, patience and support encouraged me to push myself more than I ever have. You challenge me to move outside my comfort area, and explore “what is”, as opposed to, “what if”.

Finally, to my late parents: David and Eunice Appleby for reminding me that I could do anything in the world. This journey began decades ago when my maternal grandmother, the late Eva Glenn, told me that time was always going to pass; it was what I did during that time that really mattered. Grammie, you were so right!

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Background

Biography

In May 1998, my four-year Bachelor of Education (Elementary) was conferred at the University of New Brunswick. As part of this undergraduate degree, I completed work in English and Psychology, resulting in a teaching certificate that indicated English and Psychology as my areas of concentration. The following semester, I began the work on a Diploma of Advanced Undergraduate Studies, which was awarded in September 2001. In the summer of 2014, I began work on my Master's in Education.

Throughout the coursework required for the Diploma of Advanced Undergraduate Studies, I secured classroom experience, first as a supply teacher, then as a 1.0 D contract teacher, and eventually accepted a 1.0 B contract teacher. In September 2013, I began a seconded position as a member of the High School Literacy Lead team of Anglophone School District West. The mandate of the High School Literacy Lead team was to collaborate with classroom teachers by using a variety of delivery methods: co-teaching, co-planning, and modeling, to assist with developing effective teaching practices that improve student literacy skills. As part of my position, I also assisted educators with developing knowledge and skills in assessing and evaluating student learning. To engage in this practice, it was imperative that I was in possession of current research about assessment and evaluation, as well as participating in professional development workshops and conferences hosted by individuals involved with research and practice of formative assessment.

While my tenure as a classroom teacher in the province of New Brunswick has been exclusively in high school, my teaching assignments have been diverse with respect

to curricular areas: Mathematics, Social Studies, History, Environmental Science, Co-operative Education, Canadian History, and English. In addition, I have collaborated with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in drafting and piloting new curriculum, and more recently, participating in a professional learning community that is researching suggestions to consider when designing High School Renewal in New Brunswick. In particular, I wanted to participate in this collaboration to examine strategies for assisting high school teachers with valuing documentation and evidence of student learning from conversations and observations when calculating grades.

Additionally, my role as a High School Literacy Lead provided the chance to become immersed in a multitude of English Language Arts classrooms throughout the school district. These experiences included a wide range of variables from school size and location, to grade level and student ability. Collaborating with school district Subject Coordinators, school Principals, and DEECD learning specialists served as a catalyst for dialogue about formative assessment, and the challenges it presents for the policies and procedures that encompass the high school environment. Such assessment conversations gave me different perspectives- those of the leaders within the education system.

These viewpoints, like most perspectives, were open to interpretation, which I experienced first hand during my tenure as a high school Literacy Lead. In this role I often struggled with collaborating to support formative assessment initiatives in high schools where a school's principal maintained a viewpoint that was contradictory to current research. For example, my responsibilities included accompanying principals to professional learning workshops. One of these learning experiences included an

introduction to assessment and evaluation, facilitated by Sandra Herbst that featured valuable information about formative assessment. Within a week of this workshop I received a request to provide support to a high school's Professional Learning Community (PLC) wanting to learn more about formative assessment, and the research that supported this practice in their own classrooms.

Initially, the PLC needed to differentiate between the terminology of 'assessment' and 'evaluation'. They wanted to ensure each member would be using these terms in the same manner. In addition, PLC members were provided copies of texts authored by both Sandra Herbst and Anne Davies, in support of their learning and assisting the initiation into their habitual classroom assessment practices. While these texts were being distributed to the teachers, the principal took the opportunity to remind the PLC members that all student work was to be marked, and a "good" teacher records at least twelve marks for each student prior to the first report card. Now, the PLC members were confused: why were they to evaluate and grade every piece of student work when the research contradicted such classroom practice? What about the formative assessment, the importance of providing student feedback, accounting for the voice of the student, and the documentation of student learning? What about the research that suggested the learning process ceases when a grade is given (Kohn, 1999)? As a high school Literacy Lead, I was to follow the direction of the school's principal, so how was I to proceed in this case?

Educational Landscape of New Brunswick

The structure of the education system in this province has evolved in many areas. Parent School Support Committees (PSSC) have replaced the previous locally elected

school boards, while school districts, themselves, have been realigned. The current Anglophone School District West has replaced the previous School District 17, which was earlier named School District 25. The District Office has also shuffled through a shift in identity. Changes have also taken place with respect to the naming of the office; now being referred to as the Office of the Superintendent, located in Fredericton, with Education Centers established in Oromocto, Fredericton and Woodstock. The amalgamation of several smaller school districts into one larger district presented challenges with ensuring consistency across habitual classroom routines, including assessment and evaluation practices. Such an extensive examination of district-wide classroom practices requires a great deal of time and resources to complete.

School transformations have also taken place. Oromocto High School, originally built in 1965 to host students from grade ten to grade twelve, the school began to host students from grade nine to twelve with the realignment of high schools in the late 1990's. Initially built to accommodate up to eight hundred students, enrollment at this high school ballooned to nearly fourteen hundred students once grade nine students were relocated there.

Further changes to the educational landscape in New Brunswick occurred during the 1990's with a renewed focus on technology. This meant that curricular areas including home economics, construction and business classes were abandoned in favor of a curriculum that supported Broad-based Technology (BBT) and Computer-Assisted Design (CAD). Recent renewal of high school curriculum has also resulted in the emergence of distance courses delivered via the Internet.

Classroom Composition

My time in the classroom has been predominately in *Level 3* subject areas. In New Brunswick, *Level 3* subjects are found in the *Graduating Years*: grade eleven and twelve. While these classes may share similar curricular outcomes, the standards of performance differ from their *Level 2* counterparts. For example, in *Level 2 English Language Arts*, students are expected to achieve all ten of the general curricular outcomes, with students in *Level 3* being required to meet the benchmark achievement standards expected by the end of grade eight.

I believe the idea of “standards” to be subjective. For example, DEECD has established standards for *English Language Arts*, with descriptive criteria to identify appropriate and superior achievement, but it is the responsibility of each teacher to determine whether a student has demonstrated appropriate or superior ability. To further assist, there are exemplars from DEECD that articulate the skills a student should be able to demonstrate at all grade levels. Again, determining the degree to which a student has achieved can be highly subjective, and testing for achievement can be influenced by many variables such as fatigue, room temperature, and hormonal and health irregularities (Jensen, 1998).

Furthermore, the manner in which a teacher collects evidence over time to demonstrate student achievement can vary from teacher to teacher. Consistency of standards does not always exist from teacher to teacher or classroom to classroom. How does a teacher show if academic growth has occurred, or if learning has taken place, when collecting and assessing evidence through these complex layers of subjective variability? We need to ask what has been established as baseline data, and how will this

evidence be used to inform teaching and learning? How, and what future data might be collected, organized and assessed *for* learning? What role have the students played in this process-where are their voices?

While traditional normative labels, such as “below grade” or “struggling”, dangerously construct the learning identities of the students in *Level 3* classrooms (Johnston, 2004, 2012) this was not how I viewed these students. For instance, these hegemonic labels and the hierarchical structure of high school work together to lessen expectations from these students: specifically, a grade eight achievement standard. In addition, a complacent attitude can occur to simply “keep them busy”. I do not share these sentiments.

Moreover, when it was suggested that *Shakespeare* was off limits for “those kids”, I made Shakespeare accessible to them by examining the play in the context of a revenge theme in modern society. Furthermore, when it was recommended that I lower my expectations for students who were not reading “at grade level”, I made alternate formats available such as audiobooks and graphic novels and I was able to observe students engaging in the reading and participating in book talks about young adult literature. Students shared their opinions about literary elements and the connections they were making with the literature, demonstrating that these learners labeled as *Level 3* could participate in challenging and complex literary book talks. As Gallagher (2015) explains, it is not about lowering our expectations as literacy teachers, it is about providing opportunities for students to engage with text, make connections, and increase their vocabulary in the company of their peers.

What About the Students?

The research is clear. When students are involved in the classroom assessment process they become more engaged in learning

-Davies, 2012, p. 55

Student engagement is an area of focus to be considered when discussing high school classrooms in New Brunswick. In their report, *What did you do in School Today*, Willms, et al. (2009) discuss various aspects of student engagement, and the authors include the following observations:

It is important to remember that young people are not just adults-in-training; their lives as they experience them now are as valuable and meaningful as those of the adults they will become. How they feel about school and their own achievement is, for most young people, central to their daily lives – whether they feel good about themselves and cared for at school; whether they are frustrated, anxious, bored, or depressed; whether they feel vibrant and excited by what they are learning; and, for that matter, whether they are learning at all. (Willms et al, 2009, p. 7)

The study also suggests “less than one-half of Canadian students are deeply engaged in their study of school subjects” (Willms, et al, 2009, p. 17). As a high school educator, this is a deeply concerning statistic.

Similar results have been found in our province. In December 2013, New Brunswick’s *Tell Them From Me* responses of 29,392 students in Grades 6 through 12 exhibited patterns of disengagement as well. The table below indicates the measures composing the three types of engagement and the percentage point difference between the grade with the most positive response and the one (or two grades) with the least positive response. Students in Grades 6 or 7 were the most positive across all measures. The grade(s) with the least positive response are indicated in the grey shaded area of the following table:.

Change in Student Response on Measures of Engagement

Engagement	Description	% Agreement			Grade with Lowest % Agreement				
		max %	min %	Range	8	9	10	11	12
Social	Participating in Sports	61	36	25				X	X
	Participating in Clubs	46	29	17		X	X		
	Sense of Belonging	76	57	19			X	X	
	Positive Relationships	77	72	5					X
Academic/ Institution	Value schooling outcomes	91	56	35				X	X
	Truant	6	32	-26					X
	Homework Behaviour	68	30	38			X		
		93	84	9	X				
Intellectual	Interested & Motivated	61	28	33			X	X	
	Effort	85	63	22				X	X

When reviewing information regarding schooling outcomes, there are clearly areas of concern as the value placed on schooling outcomes drops 35 percentage points, decreasing steadily from Grade 6 to the least positive response in Grades 11 and 12. As well, the data indicates high school as being a time when motivation decreases substantially in the areas of homework behavior, and interest and motivation.

At first glance these results appear discouraging. Fortunately, research indicates educators can make a difference. Willms, et al. (2009) state:

For sense of belonging, regular attendance, and intellectual engagement, over one-half of the variation among schools is attributable to classroom and school learning climate. Although family background has a strong influence on student engagement within schools, it does not account for much of the variation among schools. (p.25)

Analyses conducted by these researchers indicate:

- Students are more likely to be socially engaged in schools with a positive classroom and school climate. High expectations for student success appear to be the most important factor.

- Students are more likely to have positive records of attendance when classroom and school learning climates include the following:
 - high expectations for student success
 - appropriate instructional challenge

- Students are more likely to be intellectually engaged when classroom and school learning climates reflect the following:
 - effective use of learning time
 - positive teacher/student relations and disciplinary climates
 - high expectations for success
 - appropriate instructional challenge (Willms et al, 2009, p. 24-25)

Such suggestions as those offered by Willms and his colleagues (2009) provide an argument for practicing formative assessment in all classrooms. As well, research indicates that the most effective way to improve student engagement and achievement is by implementing changes in the classroom with teachers and students (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Brookhart and Moss (2009) also note that, “[t]he formative assessment process boosts student achievement through its consistent and continuous focus on helping students learn how to learn. It weaves student goal setting into the day-to-day, minute-by-minute fabric of classroom life and strengthens the learning partnership between students and their teachers” (p. 61).

Formative Assessment in High School

Students benefit only when teachers change what they do in classrooms
 -William and Leahy, 2015, p. 17

As a pre-service teacher completing a Bachelor of Elementary Education, I was familiar with formative assessment strategies in the elementary and middle school classrooms. Undergraduate coursework examining formative assessment provided the theoretical foundation, while student teaching and classroom observations proved

invaluable in presenting practical applications of formative assessment. My observations, as well as a review of research made it clear that formative assessment was an essential component to student learning and lesson planning in elementary and middle school settings. Whether engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues, or participating in professional learning events, I began to notice that colleagues at the elementary and the middle level were no strangers to formative assessment, and in fact, appeared comfortable with continuing to develop their professional skills in this area.

The high school classroom, that I was familiar with, did not have mechanisms in place to support valuing formative assessment. It did not have a system in place for valuing feedback when engaging in such formative assessment practices as observing student performance, or conferencing with students about the collection of evidence of learning. Instead, these high school classrooms offered a more traditional assessment environment in which the "...teacher teaches and then tests. The teacher and class move on, leaving unsuccessful students...to finish low in the rank order" (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002, p.40). As well, many counterproductive grading practices, such as averaging, grading first efforts, and using zeros indiscriminately were routine, and provided a foundation for report card grades (Kohn, 1999).

In my experience, the high school culture is one that places value on the product only, rather than collecting evidence using a number of methods including observation, discussion, demonstration and practice. Furthermore, the education system's reliance on following a numerical algorithm demands that teachers apply a numerical value to each product of student learning, as opposed to finding ways to value the process of student learning. This demand for number grades creates a learning environment that supports

the grades instead of supporting the student learning. The faith in numeric grades by educators, students, and family members can also produce and maintain the conditions for habitual counterproductive grading practices. It is the norm we have all experienced as students.

Students hear the social, management and behavior feedback,
but they hear little feedback about tasks and strategies

-Hattie, 2012, p.19

Valuing a student's work only through a numerical grade sends the message that learning has ended because "...feedback needs to cause thinking. Grades don't do that. Scores don't do that" (Leahy et al., 2005, p. 22). Feedback that is descriptive and specific can be a powerful tool for student learning Brookhart (2008) and Wiliam (2011) even theorize it can double the rate of learning when used effectively. In addition, Brookhart (2008) suggests another factor to consider with feedback is timing and keeping in mind it is "...not fair to students to present them with feedback and no opportunities to use it" (p. 2). This means assessment must be on a continuum, not an isolated event. Students require time to process the feedback and make decisions based upon it. This is a change from the traditional high school practices that I have been exposed to, which included providing feedback with the evaluative grade; hence evaluative feedback that highlighted the mistakes that had been made instead of suggestions for improving the learning. In addition, when comments are paired with a grade, most learners simply read the grade, and ignore the written feedback (Davies and Herbst, 2014; Hattie, 2012).

In addition, feedback does not need to be limited to an exchange between the teacher and the student. As Brookhart (2008) suggests that self-regulation, "...requires

using and controlling one's own thought processes" (p. 3). In addition, self-assessment fosters intrinsic motivation by offering students a reflective opportunity to examine their work and note areas for improvement. In doing so, students can increase their attention to the feedback because it has been self-generated and "...it answers their own questions and helps them to develop the self-regulation skills necessary for using any feedback" (Brookhart, 2008, p. 60).

Accountability

After more than a decade of teaching high school Language Arts, I was struggling with accountability and wanted to understand how I knew what I know about learning in my classroom. How do I assign a value to the data I collect from observing, and conferencing with students? As well, the student voice was missing in my assessment and evaluation practices. I needed to teach self and peer assessment procedures, and value its role in student learning. Leahy et. al. (2005) point out that "...students often communicate more effectively with one another than the teacher does, and the recipients of the feedback tend to be more engaged" (p. 23).

At the same time, I began to notice that many of the students in my classroom were able to engage in activities when provided differentiated opportunities, but how was I to assess and evaluate that? For example, I began to seek out alternate methods of accessing classroom literature to use when assessing a student's ability to question text. A student in my grade eleven class followed a *Personalized Learning Plan* (formerly referred to a modified education plan) and was a documented non-reader and non-writer. This identification had been validated by a multitude of education assessments performed by reputable educational psychologists. In addition, the student's placement in *Level 3*

reiterated this learning identity of this student. An accompanying education plan recommended limiting this student's classroom literature to picture books, hence isolating the student from classroom discussions about the novels that were being read. After observing the students' classroom discussions and conferencing with the student in question, it was obvious this student was able to connect and respond to grade level appropriate literature. If the material was read to the student in some manner, then evidence of ability to analyze character development and identify literary elements could be collected through such documentation practices as observation and conversation.

In this case, the obstacle to learning and participation was accessing the literature, not processing thought about the characters, or responding to the text. As Leahy et al (2005) suggests, "...using the evidence they have elicited, teachers can make instructional decisions that they otherwise could not have made" (Leahy et al, 2005, p. 24). During our conversations, the student expressed a desire to read the novel, *The Hunger Games*, because many students had been talking about how much they enjoyed reading it. As well, the movie based upon the novel was to be released soon and interest in the novel was heightened with television commercials promoting the upcoming screenplay. Once the audio version of this book was provided, the student was able to participate in the classroom literature circles and provide evidence of making connections with the literature, in addition to responding to conversations in class, and among peers.

Upon reflection, I was able to make the connection between formative assessment and student learning in my English classroom and triangulate the information collected from a variety of classroom sources including observations, conferences and products, to determine if learning had occurred. In doing so, evidence collected revealed information

about this student's ability to respond to challenging text at the literal level, the inferential level, and the personal/critical/evaluative level.

Subsequently, the student above was able to demonstrate a level of achievement. I then had to determine how a grade would be calculated in this case? Could I somehow convert my observations and conversations into a grade that would effectively communicate the learning that had taken place? The secondary education system in New Brunswick demands the evaluation of a student's learning be reported numerically. Unfortunately this majority of this numeric grade is determined by evaluating final products; failing to take into account the process and practices of learning. This is not going to change any time soon. At the same time, formative assessment is essential to more than simply establishing a numerical grade. For example, Black and Wiliam (2009) point out that assessment is formative "...to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about next steps in instruction that are likely to be better or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence elicited" (Black and Wiliam, 2009, p.9).

So how does a high school teacher balance the demands of providing grades that meet the requirements of the numerical algorithm, while effectively engaging in formative assessment? As Leahy et al (2005) point out; it is one thing for a teacher to know about the techniques and strategies of formative assessment, but a challenge to visualize exactly how these will align with current classroom practices (p. 24). Research (Davies, 2011) encourages teachers to begin with small steps and emphasize that they "[b]egin with a few people you think might be interested in learning more about

supporting student learning through assessment...[e]ven one person is a good start” (p. 107). As well, Wiliam and Leahy (2015) argue the value of modest change because when faced with changing classroom practices, the greatest challenge is to modify teachers’ habitual ways of teaching (Wiliam and Leahy, 2015, p. 17). Furthermore, Davies (personal communication August 14, 2015) tasks teachers to pull forward classroom observations and discussions when calculating reporting marks, so that the mark is reflective of all learning outcomes, not just the evaluation of products.

As I reflected upon the research I was reading that stressed formative assessment resulting in improvements to student motivation, student engagement, and learning for both the teacher and the student, I became determined to learn more about it. The research was clear: this was good for both students and teachers. It was time for me to research ways to introduce formative assessment strategies into my habitual classroom practices, while valuing the results in student grades.

Literature Review

Prior to investigating the topic of formative assessment, I researched the current status of this form of assessment in the education system including when and how it is being used in the classroom. I wanted to know how well defined the term was, and if there was a universally understood definition which was being applied to all levels of public education including elementary, middle and high school settings. Finally, I wanted to know how leaders in the schools, and within the education system were supporting teachers in the quest to effectively use formative assessment.

A great deal of literature exists which refers to formative assessment. The material I have selected to include in this literature review is limited to a sixteen year

time period (1998-2014), are authored by researchers in five geographic areas (United Kingdom, United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada), and include three school grade categories (elementary, middle and high school). The examination of literature from all grade levels provides opportunity to review formative assessment on a continuum, and to determine to what extent that this tradition of assessing exists beyond middle school grades. I wanted to understand why the traditional methods of assessing and evaluating in high schools remain entrenched in summative assessment when there is a multitude of documentation to support the benefits of formative assessment.

The articles and texts used for this literature review include a selection of data from both a qualitative and a quantitative stance. While information came from a variety of geographical regions, and sources, the most cited included Black and Wiliam (1998), which, because of its extensive examination of formative assessment research, became a reference point for the majority of other researchers and authors. Furthermore, the material reviewed represents various genres, from published texts (Davies, 2011; Davies and Herbst, 2014; Wiliam, 2011), results from primary research articles (Allen, 2009; Brookhart, 2011; Dunn and Mulvenon, 2009; Hollingworth, 2012; Irving, Harris and Peterson, 2011; Ussher and Earl, 2010; Volante, 2012; Volante and Beckett, 2011; Wininger, 2005), and other articles offering a mix of results, reviews and discussions of the applications of the research of others (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002; Earl, 2001; Heritage, 2007; Stiggins, 2009, 2005, 2002, 2001; Stiggins and Dufour, 2009). In addition, editorial articles (Kohn, 1999, 2012, 2011; Beckett, Volante and Drake, 2010; Muncer, 2006) have been included. While the material contained represents practices in elementary, middle and secondary grades, I identify

areas of confusion, inconsistency or omission identified within the selected material for this review.

The majority of the literature included in this review originates from North America; the United States in particular. Despite researchers' claim that formative assessment takes place in all grades from kindergarten to high school, I will argue that few actually provide substantial high school applications and examples. In my review of the research I have found that the high school references about formative assessment were limited in number, or include information that was more speculative or theoretical, rather than practical.

When reviewing literature pertaining to formative assessment, it has become obvious to me that an inconsistency exists in defining exactly what constitutes formative assessment. As well, the inability for educators to clearly define formative assessment in a consistent manner directly affects how educators individually apply formative assessment practices to classroom situations (Dunn and Mulvenon, 2009) and collectively across the school environment. Furthermore, the manner in which vocabulary associated with formative and summative assessment is used in contemporary assessment literature has created confusion (Ussher and Earl, 2010; Wiliam and Leahy, 2015).

Meanwhile, early discussions among educators and educational researchers paved the way for terminology associated with formative assessment, but Black and Wiliam's (1998) article *Inside the Black Box* provides the initial contemporary definition of this form of assessment, and is cited by the majority of the literature included in this review. Black and Wiliam define formative assessment as "all those activities undertaken by

teachers and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (1998. p. 10).

Researchers have pointed out that assessment is frequently thought of as “an index of school success rather than as the cause of that success” (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002), or as synonymous with standardized tests (Heritage, 2007). With this in mind, there exists a disconnect when it comes to using assessment as a basis for planning student learning, and using it for the purpose evaluating and reporting student learning. The vagueness and interchangeable use of the vocabulary terms formative, summative, assessment, and evaluation has perpetuated confusion among educators, students and their families. According to Dunn and Mulvenon (2009), such confusion about what is being studied results in little empirical research to support formative evidence. In addition, they stress how difficult it is to publish and interpret literature about formative assessment when so much confusion exists about how these assessment results are being used for the assessment *of* learning or *for* learning. Two research teams, Black and Wiliam (2009), and Wiliam and Leahy (2015) cut through the debates stating that people will continue to use terms in whatever way suits them, and adopt the inclusive definition:

[a]n assessment functions formatively to the extent that evidence about student achievement elicited by the assessment is interpreted and used to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions that would have been taken in the absence of that evidence (Black and Wiliam, 2009, p. 9).

Confusion surrounding how formative assessment is being used has been addressed by at least one group of educators. In New Zealand, there is a clear separation between the assessment *of* learning and the assessment *for* learning (Irving, Harris &

Peterson, 2011). The Ministry of Education in New Zealand has adapted a framework that clearly establishes the purposes for formative assessment. In doing so, the formative uses for assessment are defined and guidelines are established (Irving, Harris and Peterson, 2011). According to this framework, assessment *for* learning, or AfL, serves a different purpose than assessment *of* learning. Unlike traditional assessment practices that focus on giving grades and reporting, AfL actively involves students in the ongoing assessment and evaluation of their work by engaging in formative assessment processes, with the purpose of improving both teaching and learning (Irving, Harris and Peterson, 2011).

Furthermore, much of the research (Earl and Ussher, 2010; Heritage, 2007; Irving, Harris and Peterson, 2011; Volante, 2012; Wininger, 2005) indicates the need to clearly separate the nature of assessment from the use of its results. The omission of distinct reasons for the formative assessment will only lead to insufficient classroom application and academic discourse (Dunn and Mulvenon, 2009). Hence, it is imperative that classroom teachers fully understand what it is they are assessing, and how the results will be utilized; is this assessment *of* learning or *for* learning? Will the results be examined individually or collectively? Will the results inform my own learning and teaching, and be used to inform and reshape future lessons, "...to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions...taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited" (William & Leahy, 2015, p.8)?

Throughout the literature reviewed, authors time and time again praised the ability for formative assessment to be used by teacher, learner, or peer (William and Leahy, 2015) to plan for student achievement (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002; Kohn, 2011, 2012;

Muncer, 2006; Stiggins, 2009, 2005, 2001; Wiliam, 2011; Davies, 2011). Chappuis and Stiggins (2002) note that,

“students engage in the assessment for learning process when they use assessment information to set goals, make learning decisions related to their own improvement, develop an understanding of what quality work looks like, self assess, and communicate their status and progress toward established learning goals” (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002, p. 41).

But there is a void in this research and my project aims to address this gap in my personal knowledge and contribute to or initiate dialogue..

It is difficult to hypothesize one single reason for the absence of consistent formative assessment practices in high school classrooms. This literature review serves to examine documentation of practicing formative assessment in the classroom. The researchers included here clearly supported, in one way or another, the benefits, both to students and to educators, of using formative assessment “for” and “of” learning. Unfortunately, high school teachers are not represented well in this cohort of literature.

Challenges to Research

Missing from the literature are applications and examples specifically from high school classrooms. Researchers offer suggestions for weaving formative assessment into elementary and middle school classrooms, but the discussion appears to be muted in the context of high school.

Moreover, it is even absent from the pivotal reference point in the literature reviewed, Black and Wiliam’s (1998) article. Their research demonstrates that formative assessment is essential to student learning. While these researchers depict results and experiences in which formative assessment techniques result in higher student achievement, the authors draw on experiences primarily from an elementary classroom. I

would argue that high school teachers are regularly exposed to practices and examples, which originate in elementary or middle school classrooms. What are the consequences of this exposure? Do they fully engage with these practices, or do they read them as context and age specific?

I believe the lack of authentic high school examples of formative assessment strategies limits my capacity to support teachers transitioning in their assessment strategies, and results in teachers relying on more traditional practices. Researchers such as Davies and Herbst (personal conversation August, 14, 2015) note the importance of high school teachers collecting evidence of student achievement over a period of time, and they stress the importance of including evidence from conversations and observations, as well as products. This practice is valuable because “[I]t is important that [educators] examine *all* the evidence of learning collected in relation to all the standards and learning outcomes upon which the report cards grades are based” (Davies and Herbst, 2014, p. 9).

This practice of assigning a numeric value to classroom observations and student conversations is not familiar to me, or many of my high school colleagues. In my experience, there is a lack of support to assist high school teachers with documenting learning and determining grades collected from varied evidence other than quantitative sources, such as tests and final products. Kohn (2012) notes that as long as the grades on the report card are getting larger, then progress must, inherently be evident. Black et al. (2004) stress the need to re-examine educational policies as, “...such policies can actually constrain the use of formative assessment” (p. 21). Or, could it be as Stiggins (2001) suggests that, “...because of a long-standing gap in [educators’] professional preparation, neither principals nor teachers possess the assessment literacy needed to

meet these increasingly complex demands” (Stiggins, 2001, p. 13)? Conversely, such researchers as Davies and Herbst (private conversation, August 14, 2015) discuss supportive accountability in terms of educational leaders offering “tight support” when shifting practices, and “gentle pressure” when attempting new strategies and ideas in the classroom.

Unfortunately, the old paradigm of teaching, testing and moving along is still evident in secondary classrooms (Beckett, Volante and Drake, 2010). As well, Muncer (2006) says high school teachers will profess to using formative assessment in their classrooms, only to continue to follow, “assessment practices that no longer meet the needs of the learners or teachers” (p. 37). One needs to look no further than the English Language Arts curricula guides for the province of New Brunswick to view an example of this divide between theory and practice. The *Atlantic Canada English Language Arts* curriculum guide for grades 7-9 (2011) contains a section devoted to assessment “for”, “as”, and “of” learning yet this is missing in the high school curriculum. Also included is an appendix in the grades 7-9 curriculum document that provides templates for a variety of resources, which could be used in formative assessment.

In contrast, the *Atlantic Canada English Language Arts* curriculum guide for grades 10-12 (1998) does not contain information specific to formative assessment applications, let alone an appendix offering templates and tools for enabling formative assessment. While the thirteen-year gap between the publication of each of these curriculum documents may suggest that the term “formative assessment” was not common in discussions about curriculum in 1998, high school teachers would benefit from an updated appendix similar to their grade 7-9 counterpart.

In addition, I would offer that many high school teachers want to use formative assessment strategies, but are struggling to find ways to value it when report card marks are due. The high school culture relies upon a numerical algorithm for reporting achievement. There is little support within the high school culture for assessment that is not assigned a numerical value. Another notable absence in the literature reviewed are examples of how high school teachers can embrace formative assessment successfully while continuing to satisfy an education system dependent upon numerical grades. For instance, researchers advocating formative assessment in high school classrooms concede that at some point there is a degree of subjectivity involved when calculating the grade, and suggest the teacher make a “professional judgment” when including observations and conversations as part of the numerical grade (Davies and Herbst, 2014). That professional judgment is grounded in internal and varied collections of data that are in continuous dialogue with learners, peers and other educational support personnel.

Systemic Paradigm Shift

As Kohn says (2012), we live in a culture that has a “worshipful regard for numbers” (p. 1). He also notes that parents, students, administrators, political leaders, and educators all believe in the quantitative description of learning and achievement, and the current obsession with standardized test results have only fueled this obsession. This obsession with marks has certainly become a stumbling block for high school teachers who want to use formative assessment more effectively. For example, Volante (2012) acknowledges the difficulty of using formative assessment effectively when there is little student and parent “buy-in” (Volante, 2012, p.73). Others, including Muncer (2006) confess that it is a struggle to meet the needs “of the school district and the ministry;

providing marks, data and accountability” (Muncer, 2006, p. 37). It is clear that marks are important to students and many teachers feel, in the end, all that really mattered to students in high school were marks (Beckett, Volante and Drake, 2010).

That being said, Muncer (2006) suggests strategies for high school teachers, which could be applied to any subject area in high school:

- ensuring students understand learning intentions/criteria for success;
- creating effective discussions, questions and assignments;
- providing useful feedback;
- encouraging students to take ownership of their learning; and
- using peer assessment and feedback as a teaching resource

(p. 37)

While these strategies are a good starting point for high school teachers, they would be more effective if accompanied by examples of their application in the high school classroom. Furthermore, connecting the application of these strategies to the necessity for high school teachers to report numerical grades, would go a long way to supporting formative assessment as a common practice in secondary school.

Leading this change

When school leaders enter into collaborative inquiry with teachers, they not only model the formative assessment process, they embody it
 -Brookhart and Moss, 2009, p.18

A significant omission in the literature was a discussion about the role of professional development leadership in providing an environment that is supportive of formative assessment. When conducting interviews with teachers in Ontario, including secondary teachers, research states that most of these teachers received their knowledge about formative assessment from a faculty of education (Volante and Beckett, 2011). As a result of their findings, these researchers have called for teacher education reforms for

improving teacher competence with formative assessment (Volante and Beckett, 2011). Others have identified different conceptions amongst teachers about what constitutes formative assessment, and have called for further teacher education to include strategies for maintaining both teacher and student focus on assessment “for” student learning, rather “of” student achievement (Irving, Harris and Peterson, 2011).

Subsequently, Wiliam and Leahy (2015) call for school based learning communities that support and hold educators accountable to becoming more expert on their strengths, that value educators choosing the modest changes they will make, and that provide time for educators to reflect on those changes in relationships that offer strong support. Learning environments that value flexibility of experimentation and risk taking and the inclination to modify formative assessment techniques for their classroom community sustain the difficult work of change. Learning communities that recognize the complex layers of expectations that influence change and strive to include the students and parents in the introduction of change are critical to the challenge of embracing formative assessment processes.

Hollingworth (2012) examined the role of the district superintendent, the principal and the school leadership on schools in Iowa, regarding, in instruction and classroom assessment. Theorizing that the success of change initiative hinges on the relationship between the school leaders and the teachers, Hollingworth claims that successful use of formative assessment is, “facilitated by people in formal positions of school leadership” (p. 378). While she does conduct one on one interviews, rather than using a less personal approach such as surveys to obtain her information, Hollingworth conducted her interviews in a small sized high school with only thirty-eight teachers on staff. Of those

thirty-eight, almost half were willing participants on the “Formative Assessment Leadership Building Team”. This suggests that a majority of the staff of this school were willing to embrace change, and seek ways to better use formative assessment. As most of the participants in this research cohort were willing participants, I would suggest the findings may reflect their desire to take part and perhaps they responded in a more positive manner than others might.

At the same time, Heritage (2007) says there are four basic elements of teacher knowledge critical to the successful use of formative assessment: domain knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of students’ previous learning, and knowledge of assessment (p. 142). While she is thorough in her explanation of the skills teachers need to possess, Heritage fails to provide suggestion of where teachers are to obtain this knowledge, or what the teacher’s responsibility is to learn formative assessment strategies. Furthermore, she does not discuss who is responsible for ensuring teachers possess this knowledge, or who is to be held accountable when existing teachers refuse to seek opportunities for professional development to acquire these tools. Black et al. (2004) stress the importance of the co-operation of teachers in the successful implementation of changes toward formative assessment, as this involves “...a willingness to rethink the planning of lessons, together with a readiness to change the roles that both the teacher and the students play in supporting the learning process” (p.18).

Closing the Gap

Self-agency is a powerful device in fostering change because
it draws on self-motivation

-Assessment Reform Group, 2008, p. 9

Initially, professional dialogue ignited my interest in formative assessment, but that transitioned into a search through professional and academic literature as I sought deeper understanding. Throughout this investigation, I began to question and reflect upon my assessment and evaluation practices and how these practices were valued in a student's report card mark. I have participated in many professional learning opportunities at the school, the district, and the Department of Education, which were directed at improving knowledge and skills about formative assessment, but all were limited in their depth regarding high school strategies.

Expanding my research, I have attended conferences facilitated by Dylan Wiliam, Sandra Herbst and Anne Davies, as well as enrolled in graduate studies at university and all have yielded similar results-sparse high school discussions. According to the Assessment Reform Group (2008, p.8), "Unless teachers are committed through self-agency to changing their assessment practice, the prospects for successful dissemination and professional learning, leading to its embedding and sustainable development, are likely to be slim" (Assessment Reform Group, 2008, p.8), so I committed to making changes to my own assessment and evaluation repertoire.

While I acknowledge the parameters in which high school systems operate with grading and reporting, I also recognize the research (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002; Brookhart and Moss, 2009; Wiliam and Leahy, 2015) that stresses the effectiveness of teachers making small changes that endure over time, as well as the impact of teacher self assessment. As I reflect upon my own classroom practices, I realize there are strategies that I am not using to their full potential. For example, there are current practices in

place that I have assessed only to indicate if learning has occurred, but what if this evaluation of learning was further examined as assessment for learning as well?

This was an essential question as I reviewed my current students' results from the New Brunswick Grade 9 English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA). With successful completion of this assessment being a graduation requirement in the province, I traditionally would quickly note those requiring a re-write, and simply file the results with their education cumulative file. This year, I decided to further examine the results to determine what strategies would support each learner, and began to plan accordingly based upon the needs of each learner. This existing baseline data would be instrumental in planning for instruction, as well as serve as a point of reference as an indicator of student learning.

Good assessment tasks are interchangeable with good instructional tasks

-Lorrie Shepard, 2000, p.8

With Shepard's quote in mind, I embarked on a quest to further identify current classroom practices that could be re-examined as assessment for learning. For instance, I routinely use graphic organizers with students to scaffold learning, and organize student thought. As I considered applications of formative assessment strategies in my classroom, I began to speculate how this current practice could be reviewed and revised to facilitate assessment for learning. So, I began with a basic layout design, and then referred to an outcome in English Language Arts, such as 'inferring from text'. I also wanted to collect

evidence of ability to question text at three levels: literal, inferential and evaluative. The result was:

It Says....	It Means.....	It Matters...
-literal questioning	-inferential questioning	-evaluative questioning

Not only would this revised graphic organizer permit students to demonstrate the level of questioning they are able to complete, it also provides a valuable way to collect evidence for formative assessment for learning. When collected as an “exit slip” this graphic organizer can be assessed for student strengths, as well as areas in need of further support. In that respect, the graphic organizer would serve as a catalyst for future lesson planning; be it whole class, small group or individual instruction. In addition, it will inform future decisions about grouping and regrouping to provide learning experiences with clear learning targets for each group.

Another example of rethinking the role of graphic organizers in my instruction involved examining a “placemat” design that I use regularly. Traditionally used in class for organizing thoughts and incorporating student voice into their work, I was limited in my application of it. Once students completed the task associated with this graphic organizer it would be placed in their notebook and not utilized any further. In addition, aside from checking for completion, I rarely examined it for any other purpose. Upon reflection, this resource was a valuable formative assessment strategy. As I examined the

English Language Arts outcomes that require engagement with literature, I could begin with the following layout:

What I know for sure about the protagonist	What I think I know about the protagonist
What I wish I knew about the protagonist	What I want you to know about me when I am reading this novel

Once completed, this placemat-style graphic organizer may be used in a number of ways, similar to the previous example. First, it provides evidence *of* learning, as well as evidence *for* learning. Furthermore, it serves as a conduit for shared learning, which Davies (2011) says, “...allows teachers to listen to students and use their ideas as starting points for lessons” (p. 57). The idea of shared learning can also translate into self assessment, as “[e]ventually, we want students to be able to direct their own learning” (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002, p. 42). By self-assessing, Davies says (2011) students are able to question their current skills and develop language to be able to articulate what is needed for success, “...they confirm, consolidate and integrate new knowledge” (p. 8).

Incorporating the strategy of the “placemat” organizer helps students to become aware of what they are able to do, and what they need in order to move ahead with their learning. It incorporates the habits and the skills of self-awareness, which are essential to effective formative assessment (Brookhart, 2009), and ultimately results in an increase in student accountability. Moreover, researchers (Shepard, 2001; Brookhart, 2009; Stiggins, 2009) have found that students who regularly assess their learning will also display an

increase in taking responsibility for their own learning (Shepard, 2001; Brookhart, 2009; Stiggins, 2009).

Reflection of Classroom Practices

Terminology

Making classroom assessment work means reframing the conversation from one about ranking and sorting students to one about assessing learning in the context of our students' futures.

-Anne Davies, 2014, p.111

An important first step when wading into the land of formative assessment in my high school classroom was to use language that aligned with this practice. Based on the work of Davies (2011) and Davies and Herbst (2014), I began to incorporate phrases such as “evidence of learning”, and “demonstration of learning” into the learning environment, as well as into conversations with parents and guardians as I began to create what Davies (2011) describes as a “community of learners” (p. 23). In the classroom I began to use “samples” when modeling writing standards, as opposed to “exemplars”, and discussing “criteria” of quality products, in lieu of “rubrics” of what should be done. This shift in terminology did not take place overnight, but, rather, was established over a period of time. In order to be consistent with the vocabulary I was introducing to the classroom, I was persistent in using the words and phrases.

The terminology used within the learning environment changed the type of conversations I was having with students and their parents or guardians. Rather than discussing the number of “assignments” that the student had not completed, I would discuss the lack of “evidence” from the student that was currently available for

assessment. The focus of such a conversation was not the number of assignments; it was the lack of evidence. The conversation became more about evidence of learning, as opposed to completion of projects and assignments. In doing so, I was shifting the focus of the conversation from the product of the grade to the process of the learning.

Initially, the use of such terminology required me to explain what I meant, but eventually students began to use the terms in the classroom. After just one high school semester I noticed parents and guardians speaking to me about “evidence of learning” as opposed to “tests”, and “collections of evidence” rather than “portfolios”. This has resulted in communication, which I feel is more effective in sending a message about what is being learned, instead of what their student is not able to do, or has failed to do.

Collection of Evidence

Drawing from the research of Lincoln and Guba (1984) that suggest that a collection of learning evidence from multiple sources, or *triangulation*, Davies and Herbst (2014) add that classroom teachers assemble this collection over time from three sources: observations, discussions and products. As well, Davies and Herbst (2014) endorse diversity of evidence being, “as diverse as the students, teachers, and the various disciplines being taught” (p. xvii). Once this collection is assembled, teachers are then able to identify patterns and trends over a period of time and are able to use this evidence along with their professional judgment to report grades (Davies, 2011).

The strategy described above was one of the most challenging for me as a high school classroom teacher. Although I had reviewed the literature from Davies and Herbst, and had attended several learning institutes with these two educators, I was still struggling with how to value this aspect of formative assessment when calculating for

grades and report card marks. I wanted to engage my students in quality assessment in the classroom, but was at a loss for assigning a numerical grade to observations and conversations.

Fortunately, I was able to conference privately with Sandra Herbst and Anne Davies (August 14, 2015) who shared the concept of establishing a category in my marking that was called *Evidence of Learning*. In this category, I would be able to place numerical grades to reflect observations of such behaviors as engagement with text, sharing thoughts and ideas about text, and other outcomes from the English Language Arts curriculum that I had observed, or witnessed in conversations. While there would be various entries contained within this category, I could assign an overall portion of the student's mark to it. In doing so, I would still have to establish a practice of assigning a value to assessment collected from observations and conversations, but such a value would be collected over time and be supported by multiple accounts of the learning; hence it would be an "...informed professional judgment, in relation to a comprehensive collection of evidence..." (Davies and Herbst, 2014, p. xvii).

As I communicated the assessment and evaluation strategies for the class, students began to seek clarification, asking would they be "graded" on every task? How could it be that they could make an attempt at a learning target, seek feedback, consider changes to their work that showed learning and still submit for marks? While the classroom conversation ensued, students began to make connections between the learning target, the success criteria, and the process of collecting of evidence of their learning. We discussed the importance of feedback and shared ideas of how they could use feedback to plan for learning and achieving success.

As Black et al. (2004) suggests, “[s]tudents will invest effort in a task only if they believe they can achieve something” (p. 18), and with this in mind the conversation expanded to the phrase, “not yet”, which I incorporate into feedback in the classroom to indicate a student’s ability to achieve; just not quite there yet. The intended message with such a phrase is that each student has ability to arrive at a learning target, but time for practice is the variable. As well, using this terminology suggests that learning is continuing, feedback will be offered, and further attempts will be provided (Davies, 2011).

Essentially, when planning for assessment and evaluation I could assign category weights to assessment and evaluation. For instance, in a semester course there will be both summative and formative assessment evidence collected, and I could design the marking software program to reflect both:

Writing/Representing	10%
Reading/Viewing	10%
Speak/Listening	10%
Final Exam	25%
Evidence of Learning	45%

Fortunately, the designated grading software used in New Brunswick high schools permits each category to be further subdivided. By creating subcategories, I would be able to specify evidence of learning in each component of the English Language Arts curriculum: reading and viewing, writing and representing, and speaking and listening.

The result of reporting grades in this manner has been essential to the connections I have been able to make between formative assessment and reporting numerical grades in the high school classroom. In addition, I am better able to be accountable for the grades, because they are based upon evidence collected from a variety of sources over

time, and as Davies (2011) states“...[t]he more reliable and valid the evidence collected and the longer the period of time over which it is collected, the more confidence everyone can have in the evaluation” (p. 94). As well, with a category designated to evidence, there is the ability for students to receive feedback and apply it to subsequent bodies of evidence prior to submitting the task for summative assessment.

For example, students in my classes recently completed a piece of persuasive writing in my classroom. In the weeks leading up to the submission date, students viewed examples of writing, examined the writing criteria provided by the DEECD, for their grade level, and participated in co-constructing criteria for success in the designated genre of writing. Once the criteria for success had been established with students, they began to plan and draft their thoughts, participate in peer and self-assessment, and receive teacher feedback prior to completing a second draft.

Upon assessing the second draft I was able to determine gaps in writing achievement, which would serve as areas of focus in upcoming mini-lessons I was planning. After each mini-lesson, students were tasked to return to their draft to make revisions that demonstrated their learning of the one focus that was included in the lesson. Following several weeks of revisions, feedback and mini-lessons, students embarked on preparing a published version, which would be submitted as a summative assessment for evaluation.

Throughout this experience, students’ evidence of learning was valued in the “collection of evidence” marking category using the established criteria of evidence of effective editing of their draft. The published edition, which was the product after students had been provided opportunity to make improvements based upon teacher, self

and peer assessments, would serve as a summative assessment to be evaluated using the criteria previously co-constructed in class. This evaluation would be recorded in the writing/representing category.

Next Steps

To be clear, formative assessment requires more than simply implementing a strategy or two, or implementing only some of the elements, or merely experimenting with all of the elements on a surface level

-Brookhart and Moss, 2009, p. 135

As an ongoing task, Davies (2011) reminds us that learning about formative assessment and implementing it into high school classrooms will be challenging for all involved (p. 105). Traditionally, when changes to classroom practices are communicated, it is usually conveyed using a “top down” model of professional development in which teachers are told what to implement and are expected to follow suit. The result often is not productive, with the teacher pointing fingers at the “developer” when it does not work out (William and Leahy, 2015). Subsequently, researchers (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002; Davies, 2011; William and Leahy, 2015) invite teachers to recognize the value of formative assessment, and to seek out colleagues who may want to embark on this journey as a learning community. Learning together is valuable because sharing experiences can help us understand our thinking (Davies, 2011) and create a sense of belonging.

Research (Willms et al., 2009) has demonstrated that “teachers improve their practice, and hence their effectiveness, when they have opportunities to practice – and become practiced – in the company of their peers” (p. 37). In addition, William and

Leahy (2015) point out challenges inherent to formative assessment are "...not just difficult to change because they are habituated - they also contradict widely distributed and strongly held beliefs about, for example, the value of grades for motivating students" (William and Leahy, 2015, p.18).

Summary

As I reflect upon close to two decades of teaching in a high school setting, the deficiencies of some of my habitual classroom practices have become evident. I understand that my classroom can no longer support the, "teach", "test" and "move on" paradigm. At the same time, while more and more of my colleagues at the elementary and middle school levels are praising the advantages of formative assessment, these praises are falling silent among me, and many of my colleagues in high school classrooms. This is not because high school teachers do not want to join in. It is because there is currently little support in place to effectively embrace this form of assessment, or to value it in student grades and marks. Davies (2011) points out that "[a]s teachers we cannot rewrite the regulations that govern reporting, but we can look at them and think about how best to work within them on behalf of student learning" (p. 100). If formative assessment is going to be a "seamless part of the learning process in every classroom and every school" (Muncer, 2006, p. 38), then there needs to be a concerted effort to collaborate, share ideas, and participate in discussions with all educators; including high school teachers. Most importantly, all of these efforts must not leave out the students.

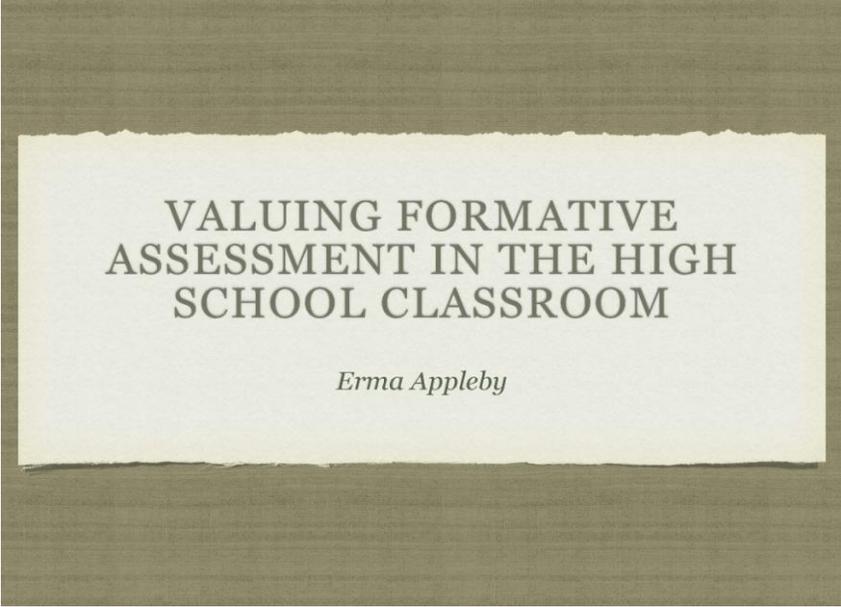
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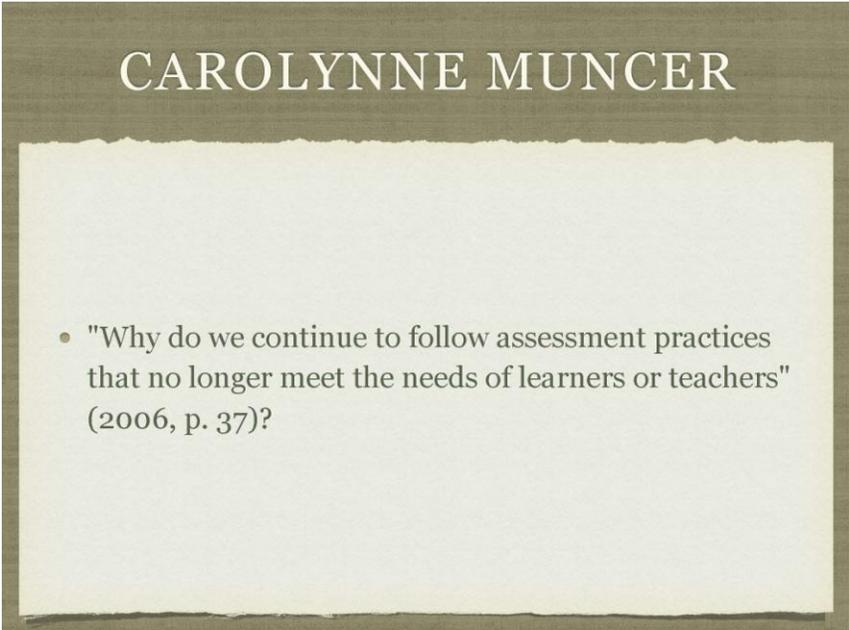
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Appendix A



VALUING FORMATIVE
ASSESSMENT IN THE HIGH
SCHOOL CLASSROOM

Erma Appleby



CAROLYNNE MUNCER

- "Why do we continue to follow assessment practices that no longer meet the needs of learners or teachers" (2006, p. 37)?

THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE

- Black & Wiliam. (1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through. classroom assessment.
- " There is a body of firm evidence that formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and that its development can raise standards of achievement" (p. 148)

...AND THERE WAS MORE

- " The giving of marks and the grading function are over emphasized" (p. 142).
- "The collection of marks to fill in record is given higher priority than the analysis of pupils' work to discern learning needs; furthermore, some teachers pay no attention to the assessment records of their pupils' previous teachers" (p. 142)

SUPPORTIVE RESEARCH

- Davies. (2000). Making classroom assessment work. Connections Publishing: BC.
- "The research is clear. When students are involved in the classroom assessment process, they become more engaged in learning" (p. 55).

- Stiggins. (2002). Assessment crisis: The absence of assessment for learning.
- "When they assess for learning, teachers use the classroom assessment process and the continuous flow of information about student achievement that it provides in order to advance, not merely check on, student learning" (p. 761)

- Chappuis & Stiggins. (2002). Classroom assessment for learning.
- " Assessment for learning helps students know what to do to move from their current position to the final learning goal" (p. 43).

WHAT ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS?

- Absence of research that involved high school settings
- Habitual classroom practice such as "grading on a curve", high stakes exams, assigning zeros, deducting marks for late submissions
- Adhere to policy that demands conformity to a numerical algorithm- the grade is the focus rather than the amount of learning that has taken place

PROPOSED AGENDA

Activation

Acquisition

Application

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

- Working with a staff of approximately 70 high school teachers
- Regroup in small groups who share curricular areas
- As a group, teachers brainstorm everything that they assign marks to in their classrooms. They use 1 sticky per item.

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ACTIVATION

Working in subject area groups, share how students show their learning in your classroom.

Write the collective ideas on sticky notes.....1 idea per sticky.

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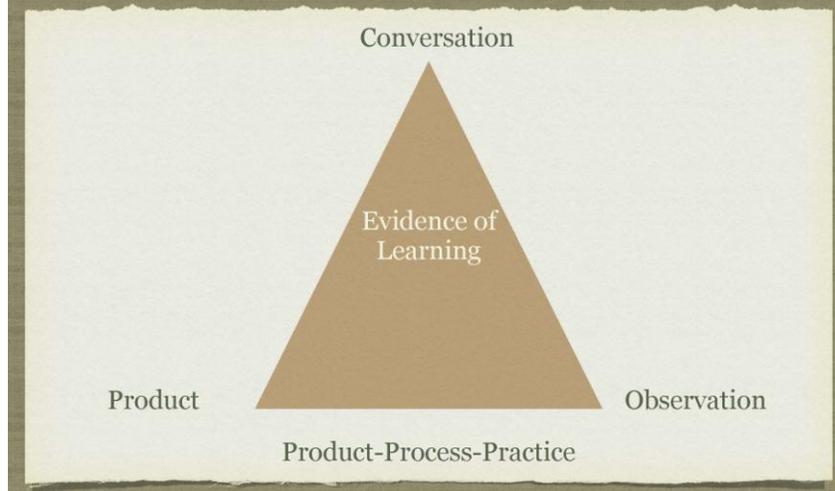
USING THE ORGANIZER

- Now, place the stickies under the category that they feel best fits.....

TAKE ANOTHER LOOK....

Product	Process	Practice

TRIANGULATION



ACQUISITION

Formative Assessment	Summative Assessment
Assessment <i>for</i> learning	Assessment <i>of</i> learning
Purpose is to improve learning and achievement	Purpose is to measure achievement
Carried out while learning is in progress- day by day	Carried out from time to time as a "snapshot"-what has happened
Focus is the learning process and progress	Focus is the product of learning
Part of teaching-learning process	An event after teaching-learning

APPLICATION

Today	...instead of
Demonstration	Assignments
Evidence	Incomplete
Not yet...	Not met....unable to do
Criteria	Rubric
Repeat, share and reflect	One and done...

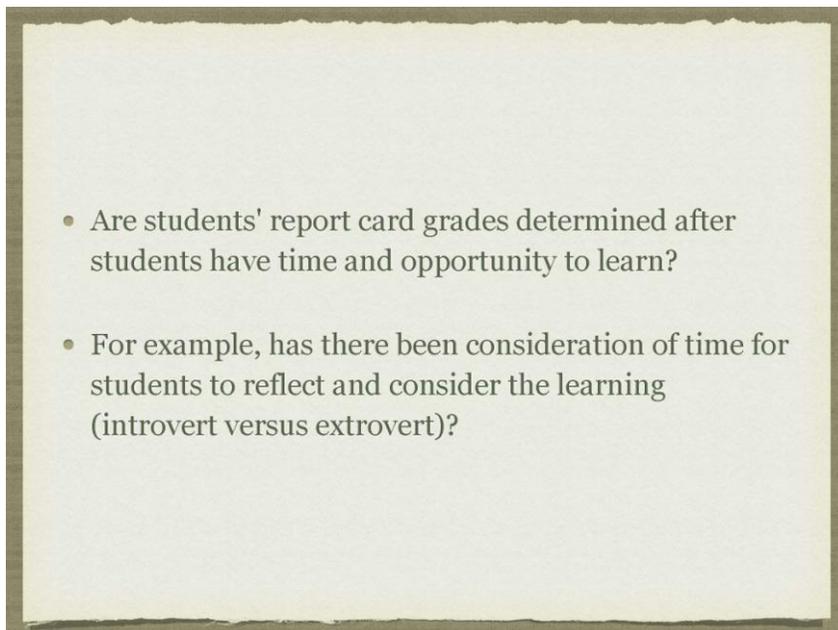
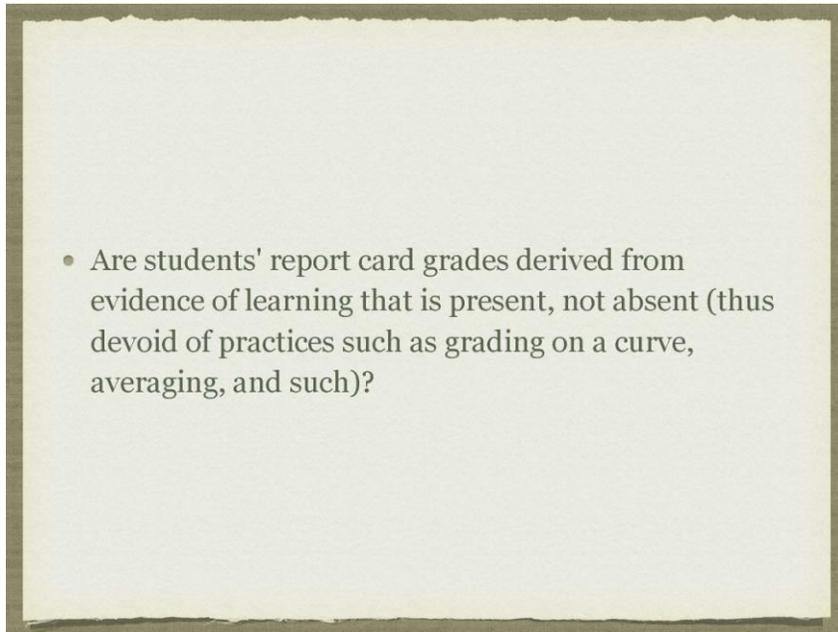
REFLECTION....

- Are students' report card grades reflective of a student's most consistent, more recent pattern of performance in relation to agreed-upon standards, criteria, and pre-determined levels of quality and given for the full range of educational standards or outcomes?

- Are students' report card grades based upon a wide array of evidence selected because of its alignment with outcomes and standards?

- Do these grades reflect informed teacher professional judgment of the level of quality of student work in relation to the standards or outcomes?
- For example, does the teacher professional judgement take into account a variety of evidence collected over time.....

- Have I ensured that students' report card grades DO NOT reflect data related to factors such as effort, attitude, attendance, and punctuality?
- For example, not deducting marks for an essay being handed in "late".



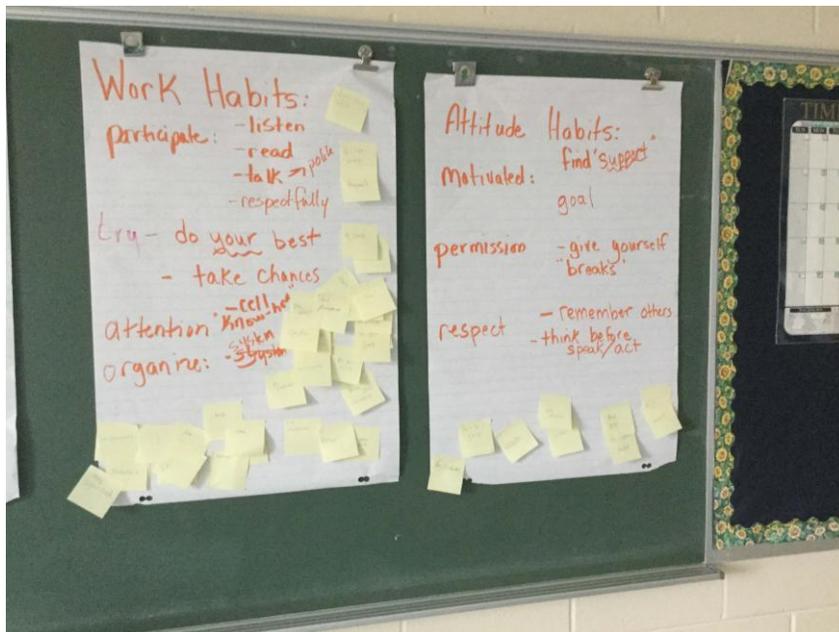
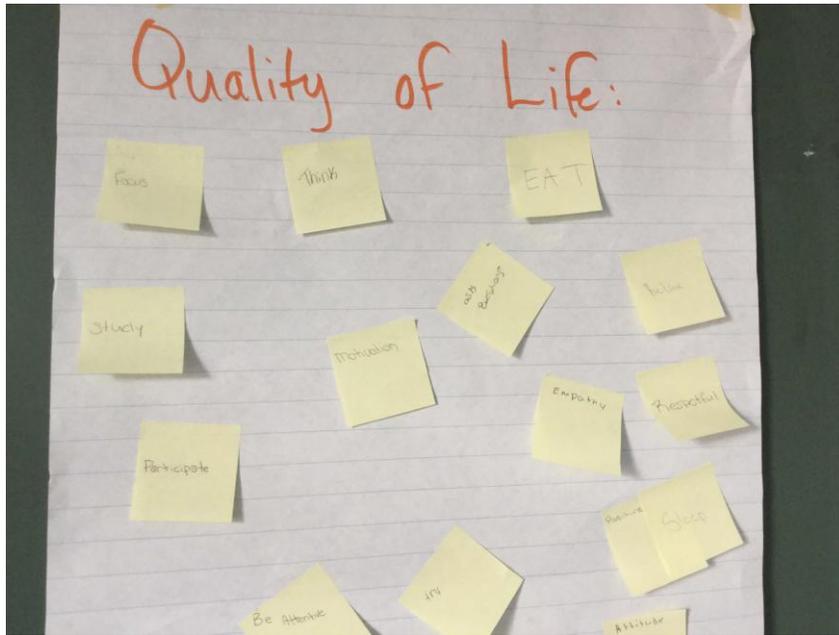
- Do the students' report card grade include their own voice?
- For example, has there been opportunity for peer and self assessment, and has this information been valued in the report card grade?

- Are report card grades validated by, and anchored in collaborative conversation and analysis of student work against agreed-upon criteria, to ensure consistency and fairness in judgment?
- For instance, co-construction of criteria for success, and sharing of examples of student work.

- Do my classroom assessment practices support student learning? If not, how might I change them so that they do?
- Are results from existing external assessment, such as the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) valued in the planning for learning?

SMALL CHANGES.....

Now in my classroom...



Name _____ Period _____

Criteria	Details
Organized so it can be easily read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> title page is included title page follows APA format style Times New Roman size 12 font is used paragraphs are separated by spacing design of layout suits the topic and audience areas of completion/attempt have been highlighted a note has been included to point out what to notice
Transitions are used to move between ideas, paragraphs and sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sentences of different lengths are used sentences start and end using more than one style sentences provide a balance of detail so not to seem like "too much"
Uses words that seem to fit the audience and the reason for the writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interesting words have been used that add vivid description the words used give clarity to the essay examples are used and they are believable and truthful words are used in a way that make the reader feel connected to the topic overused words are replaced with vivid, descriptive words

What I would like you to notice about my writing this time.....

Ms. Appleby / 15

Name Audrey Weaver Period 4

Criteria	Details
Organized so it can be easily read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> title page is included title page follows APA format style Times New Roman size 12 font is used paragraphs are separated by spacing design of layout suits the topic and audience areas of completion/attempt have been highlighted a note has been included to point out what to notice
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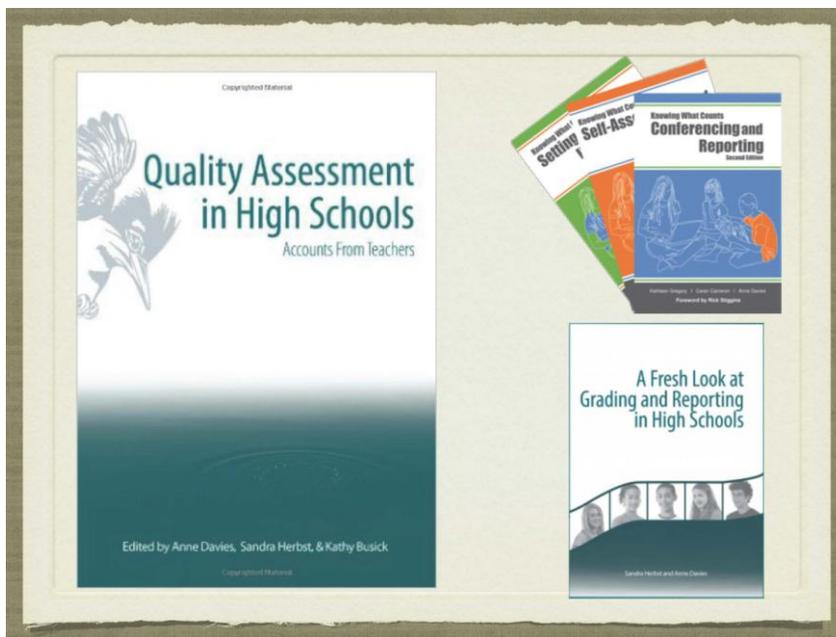
What I would like you to notice about my writing this time.....
I would like you to notice how

Outcome/Standard			
Student Name	Met	Not Yet	I Noticed.....
Boudreau, Joshua			
Brown, William			
Chappelle, Reid			
Chater, Zachery			
Doucette, Kevin			
Goddard, Alexander			

Sept- Oct 2015

Teacher Name: Erma Appleby

	Read Evidence	Conference #1	
(read)	✓	Morrison	Completed Oct 20
2033	Oct 5, 7	Complete Oct 6 doing wrap up now	
Power Play	Oct 5, 7 ✓	reads in class	
	Oct 6, 7 ✓	reads in class (14)	
abit	Oct 5, 6, 7	read in class (13, 14)	Completed Oct 15
	Oct 7	Morrison - Orinca Series	Completed Oct 20
'own	Oct 6, 7	- Hoyt, reads more runner Fantasy Sleepers	- targets novel
	13, 14, 14	- read Oct 14	
	13,		
evary	Oct 5, 7, 13, 14 ✓	Mickay/Mickinnon	Completed
	Oct 5, 7 Dedicated	Completed novel → tests	
	Oct 5, 7		
rim	Oct 5, 7, 13, 14	Morrison	Completed Oct 16
	Oct 5, 7, 13, 14	Oct 6 - Comprehension plot development	Completed Oct 20
iry Tales	Oct 5, 7, 13, 14		
	Oct 5, 7, 14 ✓		



CURRICULUM VITAE

Candidate's full name: Erma Marie Appleby

Universities attended: Univeristy of New Brunswick
Diploma of Advanced Undergraduate Studies, 2001
Bachelor of Education, 1998

Conference Presentations: NBTA High School Subject Council
Deeper Reading, High School Applications
Moncton, 2015

Professional Learning Presentation
Cross Curricular Graphic Organizers
Anglophone School District West, April-June 2015

Professional Learning Presentation
Graphic Organizers: Middle School Applications
Anglophone School District West, May 22, 2015

Atlantic Canadian Combined Teaching Associations
CONTACT 2010
Differentiation Across the Curriculum
Cornerbrook, NL, August 9-13, 2010